

**Governor's Child Welfare Advisory Committee  
Summary of Education Subcommittee Conference Call  
Tuesday, October 7, 2008**

**1. Roll Call/Introductions**

Members participating in the conference call were Co-Chairs Randy Peters and Nancy Magnall; Jeff Anderson; Cynthia Cox; Carol Greta; Jason Haglund; Judge Kathleen Kilnoski; ManDee Phillips; Ruth Phillips; Ken Riedel; Tom Southard; and Ron Stehl. No members were absent. Gail Barber from the Children's Justice Initiative also participated in the call.

**2. Review 3 Priorities of Subcommittee**

The three priorities of the subcommittee set during the previous meeting were reviewed:

*Timely enrollment and transfer of records and transfer of credits*  
*Sharing of confidential information between DHS and school districts*  
*Collaboration between DHS, school districts, and other professionals*

**3. Update on Work of other Groups with Similar Concerns**

*Elevate:* Ruth Phillips reported that the Elevate group will release their final list of priority issues for the upcoming legislative session on October 16 or 17. Once the list is released, she will forward a copy to distribute to this subcommittee after which we will decide how we can coordinate our efforts on those issues involving education.

*Children's Justice Initiative:* Gail Barber joined us to update our subcommittee on the Children's Justice State Council Subcommittee on Education and Foster Care and to discuss how our two subcommittees might be able to coordinate our efforts. Gail reported that their subcommittee has identified some of the same issues as areas of concern that our subcommittee has. They also want to make sure that children in care in the younger grades are receiving the attention they need to develop the foundational skills they need, particularly in math and reading. She and Ron Stehl reported on the initiative started by Roger Ferguson of Des Moines who has used his own resources to begin the Foster Aunt and Uncle Project. It focuses on assisting young people who are in long-term foster care to bring their academic skills up to the level needed to obtain meaningful employment or to prepare them for higher education. They are working with a local learning center in Des Moines to have the students assessed to determine their academic needs and then are providing appropriate tutoring to bring them up to grade level and to enable them to obtain high school diplomas rather than GEDs. Gail reported that DHS is supportive of exploring how this program could be replicated to reach more students, but that process is in the early stages.

*Technical Assistance from ABA:* Gail also reported that Mary Nelson has been in contact with Kathleen McNaught from the American Bar Association's Center for Children and the Law to determine what technical assistance they can provide our state on issues surrounding children in care. The ABA collaborates with Casey Family Programs to manage the Legal Center for Foster Care and Education. Their website ([www.abanet.org/child/education](http://www.abanet.org/child/education)) contains a variety of helpful information on education issues for children in out-of-home care. A number of their resources were provided to the

subcommittee for review prior to the meeting. Since there are a number of different entities in the state working on and concerned with the same issues involving the education of children in care, the ABA has suggested that we bring all the parties together for a forum which they would facilitate to lead a discussion and help develop a plan of how we can jointly and/or individually move forward on these issues. There is a conference call scheduled for Friday, October 10, to discuss this possibility. Co-chairs Randy Peters and Nancy Magnall will participate in that conference call and will report back to the committee.

Gail also mentioned the Fostering Connections to Success federal legislation which was recently passed and signed into law by President Bush. It contains a section on promoting educational stability which addresses a number of our issues of concern including ensuring kids remain in their school of origin when in their best interest; use of IV-E foster care maintenance payments to cover transportation costs; and coordination of efforts between schools and the child welfare agency to ensure immediate and appropriate enrollment in new schools with all educational records provided. Our subcommittee will be interested in seeing how these provisions are implemented in Iowa. A summary of that legislation will be sent to all subcommittee members along with this document.

*DHS/Dept. of Ed. Collaborations:* A copy of the Interagency Memorandum of Agreement between DHS, the Department of Education, and Department of Public Health was provided to subcommittee members. It addresses (on page 8) a number of issues, including those prioritized by our subcommittee, and indicates that the Departments will explore establishing work teams or other processes to address those issues. Carol Greta indicated she had nothing new to report regarding DHS/Department of Education collaboration on these issues.

There was some discussion on who has the right to assume the role of parent for children in foster care when the birth parent cannot be located or chooses not to be involved. Carol indicated that the role of “parent” is defined rather broadly and does include others caring for a child including foster parents. That does, however, conflict with DHS’s direction to foster parents that they usually do not have the authority to sign parental approval forms for children in their care. There needs to be ongoing work to help sort out this issue.

Carol also indicated that there is ongoing work in the Department of Education on a “data warehouse” which would contain records of every student in the state and which would have the ability to electronically transfer records from one school district to another. This is still several years away from becoming a reality but would allow the tracking of data regarding the educational performance of children in care as suggested in the factsheet from the Legal Center for Foster Care and Education on data collection which was provided to subcommittee members in their background materials prior to the meeting.

In response to the concern raised about youth being placed in appropriate classes when changing schools and not having to repeat courses they already completed in a previous school, Carol indicated that in this state where we have local school district control, it often comes down to the quality of the school counselor who assesses the student’s previous course work and helps make decisions about placement in appropriate classes. The reality is that there are not enough counselors to effectively provide that

service. The Department of Education has provided a checklist for schools to follow in obtaining records when a child comes into their district. There is, however, no time line that has to be followed for records transfer.

The committee again raised the issue of the need to explore ways that confidential student information can be shared between DHS and school districts when appropriate. The law allows such sharing between school districts but not between school districts and DHS without signed releases.

Judge Kilnoski asked if there is one person within DHS who is charged with the oversight of issues involving the education of children in care. Jeff Anderson indicated that within different DHS divisions there may be a various persons designated as the point person on education but there is no single person internally. The judicial branch has the same issue. It was suggested that this might be a suggestion worth exploring.

#### **4. Brief Discussion of Background Materials**

The following materials were provided to the subcommittee members prior to the meeting and were referred to throughout the meeting.

*Memorandum of Agreement Between DHS/Dept. of Ed/ Dept. of Public Health*

*Legal Center for Foster Care and Education Factsheets*

*Credit Transfer and School Completion*

*Blueprint for Change: Education Success for Children in Foster Care*

*Collecting Data to Improve Educational Outcomes for Children in Care*

*Blueprint for Change—8 Goals*

*White Paper on Education of Children in Foster Care*

**5. Discuss Plan of Action:** It was the consensus of the group that we not set another meeting of the subcommittee until we have information from the conference call with the ABA and their suggestions on how to proceed with coordinating the work of the various groups. Our next meeting may involve participation in the suggested forum of all those committees working on similar issues. The co-chairs will contact the subcommittee members when further information is available.